

## **Learning to Love by Gabriezzu**

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**Summary:** The Losers were meant to be together, and they had known that since they moment they met. How were they supposed to be together, however, was a question that was better not think about. (Poly!Losers)

## Learning to Love

It was an unspoken truth: they all loved one another from the moment they met, though Richie suspected, sometimes late at night when he was left alone on his room with nothing but his thoughts, that those feelings, so intense and real, might be older than that. Older than them, perhaps. Older than the town, than the clown, than the sun and the stars together.

They loved one another more than what they would ever be able to understand, and they were fine with that.

But of course it wasn't that easy. They were children living in a time of strange suspicious and judgmental but quiet stares. Of laughs at their backs and turns of their heads; of mothers crying in their rooms with the volume of the TV too high to drown their weeps. Of fathers who beat their daughters because they were worried and mothers who made their sons feel sick. Of parents whose hugs felt like knives and whose absence was a bless.

They were children living in a time where two boys hugging on the street would mean almost a death sentence.

So at the beginning, it was just to her, to Beverly. It was easier to believe, after all, that six boys fell in love with the same girl. But they knew that wasn't true: they loved Beverly deeply, that wasn't a lie, but they didn't *only* love *her*.

Every "I love you" had a quiet "*all*" at the end.

They didn't think about it. They didn't *have* to. Their hands simply brushed one another in the darkness of the cinema, their stares found one another by themselves, and the blush flood their faces without their permission. But that was it. Never spoken of, never thought of. They were children, at the end, and as long as they could keep running after one another under the hot sun of a summer day and laughing until their bellies hurt, that was more than enough.

But time is merciless, and sooner than later the Losers found themselves wanting more, *feeling* more. Much more than they could

handle. So slowly, almost with fear (of rejection, of loss, of seeing the eyes of the others full of disgust. Of never being able to lay their heads on their shoulders and never hearing their own names coming out of the others' mouths the same way. Hell, of everything), things progressed.

The second time things got real (the first one had been in the dark, in desperation, in tears, in *fear*), it was only Bill and Beverly. A quiet and innocent kiss shared in the privacy of the little clubhouse that had become their home in a winter afternoon was all the spark needed to wake the sleeping fire that had been their love since they were children.

None of the Losers got surprised when, a few days later, Bill and Beverly officially became a couple. It was just obvious, after all: no one had forgotten, in the three years since it happened, the sound of Bill's voice loving Beverly over and over again, without a stutter.

And in a way, everyone (and that included Benjamin Hanscom) was sincerely okay with it: Bill and Beverly were happy and in love, and seemed to be made for each other. But it also hurt. Deep and coldly, it hurt.

The way Beverly's beautiful pink lips only touched Bill's. The way Bill's coppery hairs tangled in Beverly's fingers whenever he rested his head in her lap. The way their hands fit together like matching puzzle pieces. The heat in their stares and the shine in their precious eyes. The bright red in their cheeks.

It didn't bother the Losers because they were "jealous" (*Of Big Bill, of course! Imagine being jealous of Big Perfect Bill!*) Or anything alike. Jealousy could be handled, after all: just turn around whenever those two started getting too sweet and that's it. Just throw a joke here and there and problem solved. Just look around and see how many kind of birds you can find.

The real problem was that seeing those two together woke feelings deep inside the others that they just weren't ready to face. Before Beverly and Bill had become a couple, sometimes Beverly would kiss them on the cheek, or lay her head in their shoulder, or whatever else she felt like doing. It was never enough, of course, but it was

*something. It made easier the fact, for each individual mind, that that was all they were ever going to get (from her. Never from the other guys, obviously. That'd be disgusting! ).*

But now all that attention (and much more, they were sure) was to Bill.

So for the first year, the Losers tried to pretend everything was normal. Bill and the rest of the guys were quite good at it (with the exception of Stan and Richie, who sometimes tried so hard that it became painfully evident), but Beverly was tired of it.

And once again, Beverly was forced to be the one to start it all. In her 15thbirthday, after the group had drank a few beers that Richie and Mike had stolen from their respective fathers, Beverly saw the opportunity.

In the middle of a drunken dance in the Denbrough's house, Beverly kissed Eddie. Not with passion, not for the heat of the moment. She did it because she loved him, just as much as he loved her.

After the short kiss ended, she looked over Eddie's little shoulder to find Bill. She knew he was looking, as their eyes had met right before she had lend down and kissed Eddie by surprise. Beverly thought, in that fraction of a second, that Bill knew what she was going to do. And he had *smiled*.

Beverly loved Bill as much as she loved any other of the Losers, but she also respected their relationship. They were a couple, and that obviously meant that what she had just done was wrong, to say the least. But Bill wasn't mad at all.

Eddie, on his part, had been a bunch of nerves after that. He hadn't expected that, and though he didn't dislike the kiss at all, he had stepped away as fast as he could, apologizing to Bill. Bill, on his part, was still calmly sitting on his couch, and had only laughed, passed an arm around Eddie's shoulder, and gave him a sip of his beer.

How the others had become part of their relationship was a bit less clear. It was so natural for them to simply *be* with Beverly that it was like it had always been like that: Richie joking around that he had

the best girlfriend from them all (even when they had the same girlfriend), Ben writing her beautiful poems, Eddie cuddling with her on movie night, Stan holding her hand under the table at lunch time, Mike sitting her on his lap, Bill kissing her hair.

Up to that point, everyone seemed more relaxed, though Beverly still had the feeling that something was still off.

It wasn't until a few months later, when Stan had confessed to her between tears and sobs that his heart didn't only belong to her (*as it should be*) that she finally understood: how could she have been so *blind*? They were *Lucky Seven*, and they were meant to be together. The seven of them.

But she said nothing. She just held Stan while he cried, and brushed his hair with her bare fingers until he stopped trembling, telling him over and over again it was okay. She could do nothing more: it wasn't her the one everyone was going to look at. It wasn't her the one who was "wrong" simply because of who she loved. It wasn't her the one who'll have to face rejection and disgust in every stare. It wasn't her place to say anything this time. This would have to be something that *they* faced when they were ready.

Because she was convinced, after all, that Stanley Uris was not the only one with such conflicting feelings. She could see it, she could *sense* it, and so did the rest of the Losers. The truth, their real feelings, was so easily seen that it was incredibly easy to ignore. Everyone in their little circle saw it, but no one had the courage to do anything. She would have to wait for them to realize it by themselves.

And the moment came sooner than she thought.

It wasn't until the night Richie got so drunk that ended up confessing what they had all been thinking that things finally progressed: he said, with his voice shaky from the alcohol and whatever else he had gotten in himself, that he loved them all. And he kissed them, all of them. None of them rejected him, though Beverly could swear she saw Bill's fists closing, ready to punch him in the face (*old habits don't die easily*).

In a way, Beverly was relieved for the sudden confession. Of course it would have been better if the situation had evolved more naturally, with a clear mind and in a better moment, but she also knew there was no way to say these kind of things in a sober state. She herself had had to drink a few beers before she had even allowed herself to *think* about it.

The next day, for the first time since they met, they did what they feared the most: talk about it.

Many times before had Richie made jokes about it, or had Ben made a (probably) unconscious allusion to it, but never before had the seven teens sat down on the living room of the Tozier residence, each with a cup of hot coffee or tea, and seriously simply discuss the situation.

Beverly, since she had come to peace with the possibility since a long time ago, was the one to put the cards on the table: they were in love. All of them. And that was okay.

They had known it since the moment they had met one another, and whatever excuse they had given to themselves all these years had been nothing but that: an excuse.

Eddie gave a few hard aspirations to his inhaler and passed his hand over his eyes to erase tears that had not yet fallen; Mike's eyes opened and stared directly at Beverly; Ben started pulling the threads of his sweater; Bill tensed up and his fists closed hardly; Stan's eyes filled with tears, and Richie looked at everywhere but her. But no one denied anything.

One by one, they admitted it. With cracking voices and wandering eyes, they admitted it.

Beverly stood up, with a warm and small smile over her face.

"Come here," she said, leaving her steaming cup on the table beside her and opening her arms "All of you"

Eddie was the first one to go her, because he was the most afraid. He had all reason to. The others joined them right after.

"I love you, guys," she said, "And it's okay. This is okay."

At the end, the seven self-proclaimed Losers fell asleep right there, curled up one against the other, in the cold and hard floor of the Tozier residence.

They were going to face many challenges in this new and complicated stage of their lives. They would have to forget everything they thought they knew of love and learn to love in a different way, and it would take time. It would be difficult, and perhaps even painful. But they were going to overcome each and all of the obstacles. Together, just like it should be.